

## **COVID-19 Response Update: Protecting People Experiencing Homelessness and Ensuring the Safety of the Shelter System**

**Date:** June 1, 2021

**To:** City Council

**From:** City Manager

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report outlines the significant action the City of Toronto has taken to protect people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19 and ensure the safety of the shelter system. The City has implemented numerous safety measures in the shelter system to reduce the risks of COVID-19, including operating 28 new temporary shelter locations to create physical distancing, enhancing infection prevention and control measures, testing strategies, and an isolation and recovery program. Shelter, Support & Housing Administration's (SSHA) 2021 gross operating budget for Homelessness and Housing First solutions is \$663.2M, including \$281 million for COVID-19 response expenses. The City has implemented a range of strategies to expedite vaccine roll-out to people experiencing homelessness, as reducing barriers and achieving high rates of vaccination is essential to reducing the risk of COVID-19 in shelters.

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a noticeable increase in the number and size of encampments. This increase has led to heightened concerns about the safety and well-being of people living outdoors, as well as the impact on the surrounding community. The City remains focused on providing a human services response to encampments and offering voluntary referrals for people sleeping outdoors to safer inside space with supports including meals, laundry, harm reduction services and development of a housing plan. Outreach staff have provided more than 1,600 people staying in encampments with access to safe inside space since the start of the pandemic including 203 people in the past month. Space remains available for those living in encampments to access the City's shelter system.

Encampments contravene several chapters of the Municipal Code and are not a solution to unsheltered homelessness. The safety and health conditions for people who stay outside are complex and serious. The City's response to encampments takes into consideration the health and well-being of those living outside and the broader community needs, including access to green space for safe outdoor recreation during the pandemic, and upcoming summer parks programming and permitting requirements including for summer camps. City parks must be ready, safe and accessible to all

residents of Toronto. In particular, parks give residents living in apartment buildings or shared housing spaces a safe outdoor space to play and exercise.

Homelessness is a complex social issue that has become more challenging as a result of the pandemic and requires solutions from all orders of government, businesses, community organizations and individuals. While temporary shelters are necessary to provide emergency shelter to people in housing crisis who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness and to address immediate concerns, they are not permanent solutions to homelessness.

In addition to the significant efforts to ensure the safety of the shelter system during the pandemic, the City has taken immediate action to create new affordable and supportive housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. In September 2020, Council approved the 24-month Housing and Homelessness Recovery Response Plan aimed at accelerating investments in the City's 10-year housing plan to urgently create 3,000 permanent, affordable homes before the end of 2022 dedicated for people experiencing homelessness.

Through the federal Rapid Housing Initiative and the City's Emergency Housing Initiative, a total of 1,248 supportive housing opportunities, which are on track to be completed in 2021, are targeted to those experiencing chronic homelessness. Helping people move successfully out of shelters into housing will create space within the shelter system for those living outside to move indoors.

Ongoing focus and advocacy from the City of Toronto to other orders of government is required to ensure successful delivery of the City's 24-month Housing and Homeless Recovery Response Plan by the end of 2022, and the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan by 2030. Investments in permanent affordable and supportive housing will improve the health and socio-economic outcomes for vulnerable and marginalized residents, reduce cost to the public sector, and increase the resilience of our housing and homeless systems.

Ensuring a range of supports are available, in an integrated service model, for individuals with more complex challenges such as serious mental health issues, substance use and other disabilities alongside facing systemic racism and discrimination, will be critical to ensuring success in alleviating chronic homelessness, reducing demand on emergency services and supporting housing stability.

The City of Toronto, with our community partners, will continue its dedication to reducing the risks of COVID-19 in the shelter system and work with the federal and provincial governments to secure investments in a range of affordable and supportive housing solutions. As City Manager I would like to thank City staff and our community partners for their work outlined in this report, and their ongoing commitment to protect people experiencing homelessness in our city.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The City Manager recommends that:

1. City Council direct staff to continue to take appropriate steps to reduce risks of COVID-19 in the shelter system.
2. City Council direct staff to continue to take all steps necessary to achieve a high rate of vaccination for people experiencing homelessness.
3. City Council request the provincial government to continue to prioritize vaccine supply for shelter clients and frontline staff, including expediting second doses for these vulnerable groups.
4. City Council direct staff to continue working with those living in encampments to offer safe indoor space.
5. City Council reiterate its request to the federal and provincial government to urgently provide one-time capital and ongoing operating funding to fully implement the 24-month Housing and Homelessness Recovery Plan by the end of 2022, including funding for the remaining 2,460 permanent housing opportunities, comprised of 1,460 supportive housing units and funding for 1,000 portable housing benefits.
6. City Council direct the City Manager to work with Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA) municipalities and community partners and institutions to request the Province establish a coordinated approach to create supportive housing based on a social medicine model which integrates affordable housing with health care and a range social services to help people successfully exit homelessness, acknowledging that affordable housing with wraparound supports play a critical role in reducing chronic homelessness and addressing systemic issues faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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The 2021 Operating Budget and 2021 – 2030 Capital Plan includes significant investments in support of people experiencing homelessness, as detailed below.

### ***Shelter, Support and Housing Administration***

SSHA's 2021 gross operating budget for Homelessness and Housing First solutions is \$663.2M, including \$281 million for COVID-19 response expenses. This represents an increase of 40% from the original 2020 SSHA operating budget for Homelessness and Housing First solutions, prior to the pandemic.

SSHA spent \$166.7 million on COVID-19 response in 2020. In 2021, SSHA has budgeted \$281 million for COVID-19 response, which includes continuing to operate additional temporary spaces through the use of existing hotel shelters and other response locations. As of the end of April 2021, \$110.6 million has been spent reflecting

the City's largest expense related to COVID-19 response, and has been supported by provincial and federal governments including through the Social Services Relief Fund and Reaching Home programs. SSHA is projecting to fully spend the \$281 million for the COVID-19 response in 2021.

### ***Capital Investments***

The 2021 Operating Budget also includes \$42.5 million for the City's Housing Secretariat, which predominantly funds support in the development of new and affordable housing. Capital investments facilitated through the Housing Secretariat include:

- COVID-19 Housing & Homelessness Response: \$221 million in Federal capital funding allocated through the Rapid Housing Initiative to create 540 new permanent affordable homes towards a target of 840 homes through acquisitions, renovations and conversions of TCHC units;
- Housing Now: \$50.7 million to create mixed-use complete communities leveraging City lands to build 4,520 units against a target of 10,000 City-owned affordable rental housing;
- Modular Housing: \$47.5 million to create 250 units against a target of 1,000 supportive modular units to achieve housing stability and homelessness prevention;
- Supportive Housing: \$47.4 million to create 660 City-owned supportive housing units through partnerships with TCHC and the federal / provincial governments to assist individuals out of homelessness and secure permanent housing with supports;
- Rental Development & State of Good Repair (SOGR): \$36.8 million to activate City lands to build 488 affordable rentals against a target of 500 rentals as a part of neighborhood revitalization and TCHC State of Good Repair; and
- TCHC Building Repairs: \$2.7 billion to maintain current TCHC housing stock in a state of good repair through \$1.76 billion in added City investments.

The City will continue to follow the guidance of the City's Medical Officer of Health and Provincial guidelines related to COVID-19 for congregate living settings. The City plans to continue current response efforts, including services at temporary shelter sites to support physical distancing measures, until at least the end of 2021. There is currently no indication when this guidance will be changing. Budget impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 response will be considered through the 2022 budget process.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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On December 16, 17, 18, 2020, City Council adopted PH19.11, "Emergency Housing Action" which outlines a plan for the City to deliver a minimum of 1,248 supportive homes in 2021. The plan responded to direction from Council to rapidly increase the

supply of available supportive housing, particularly housing suitable for those experiencing chronic homelessness within the shelter system to free up space within the shelter system for those living outside to move indoors.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.PH19.11>

At its meeting of October 27, 2020, City Council adopted EC16.1 "Interim Shelter Recovery and Infrastructure Implementation Plan" and authorized staff to continue to deliver an enhanced outreach strategy that focusses on ensuring the safety of those in encampments, increasing opportunities for permanent housing and access to safe indoor spaces, providing essential supports, and continue to work with interdivisional and community partners on the City's comprehensive approach to encampments using both human rights and public health approaches grounded in evidence-based practices that promote client and community safety. This report also directed the City Manager, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, to find the necessary funds to spend on emergency measures to provide housing, shelter, or respite in the event that Toronto's Shelter system cannot meet demand.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC16.1>

At its meeting of September 30, 2020, City Council adopted PH16.8, "Addressing Housing and Homelessness in Toronto through Intergovernmental Partnership" which described the advocacy the City was undertaking to secure additional investment from both the Provincial and Federal governments. The report also outlined the City's 24-Month COVID-19 Housing and Homelessness Recovery Response Plan aimed at providing dignified, stable permanent housing options for 3,000 people experiencing chronic homelessness within the shelter system, with the support of the Federal and Provincial governments.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.PH16.8>

## **COMMENTS**

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The City's approach to addressing homelessness is grounded in a Housing First approach. Housing First focuses on helping people to find permanent housing as quickly as possible, with the supports they need to live as independently as possible, without any preconditions such as accepting treatment or abstinence. The Housing First approach includes providing individualized, client-centred supports that are strengths-based, trauma informed, grounded in a harm reduction philosophy and promote self-sufficiency.

The HousingTO Plan affirms the City's commitment to a human rights-based approach to housing. The progressive realization of the right to housing includes considering how City policies and programs affect residents' access to adequate housing and meaningfully engaging with people experiencing homelessness in identifying their needs and alternative places to live. Staff will continue to apply a human rights lens in the development and implementation of City policies, directives and actions that impact people experiencing homelessness, including those in encampments.

The City remains focused on the safety of those in encampments and assisting people sleeping outdoors into move into safer, indoor spaces through the shelter system, including hotel spaces, and housing options with supports.

Having access to appropriate indoor space that individuals staying in encampments can be referred to is critical to the City's efforts to address unsheltered homelessness in Toronto. The City of Toronto has a robust emergency shelter system, and staff have worked hard throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to increase access to alternative forms of indoor space including the operation of 28 temporary facilities to achieve physical distancing in the shelter system and provide spaces for people to move indoors from encampments. Space remains available for those living in encampments to access the City's shelter system.

The City has also taken urgent action to add new affordable and supportive housing options for people experiencing homelessness, by implementing a plan to deliver 1,248 new supportive homes in 2021. These units are part of the Housing and Homelessness Recovery Response plan to accelerate an additional 3,000 permanent housing opportunities over the next 24 months to address the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness in our city. Helping people move successfully out of shelters into permanent housing will create space within the shelter system for those living outside to move indoors.

This report outlines:

1. The actions taken to protect people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19, including enhanced Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) measures and vaccination efforts
2. The coordinated interdivisional response to encampments
3. Supports for people living outdoors including Streets to Homes outreach and progress in moving people indoors through the Pathways Inside Project
4. Safety of encampments and access to park space
5. Importance of federal and provincial support for permanent solutions to homelessness

## **1. Actions taken to protect people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19**

Since the start of the pandemic, the City of Toronto has implemented numerous safety measures in the shelter system to reduce the risks of COVID-19, including operating 28 new temporary shelter locations to create physical distancing, implementing rigorous infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures, testing, isolation and recovery, priority vaccinations and a focus on permanent housing.

There are currently more than 6,000 spaces in the shelter system, across more than 100 locations operated by the City and our funded community partner providers. The temporary facilities have been set up to meet Ontario Ministry of Health guidelines for physical distancing in congregate living settings as well as to provide additional space for people to move indoors from encampments.

The City plans to continue its current response efforts, including services at temporary shelter sites to support physical distancing measures, until at least the end of 2021 as we continue to follow the guidance of the City's Medical Officer of Health and Provincial guidelines related to COVID-19 for congregate living settings. There is currently no indication that this guidance will be changing in the near future. Budget impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 response will be considered through the 2022 budget process.

While the shelter system saw an increase in outbreaks and associated cases that mirrored the impacts of the third wave in the broader community, there has been a steady reduction in COVID-19 outbreaks over the last few weeks. Toronto Public Health (TPH) defines an outbreak as two or more cases of COVID-19 with linked transmission. As of May 31, there are eight confirmed outbreaks (with 85 associated cases) within the City's shelter system (see Attachment 1 for more details on recent trends). Outbreaks and related cases are reported by Toronto Public Health through the COVID-19 dashboard at [www.toronto.ca/covid-19-weekday-status-of-cases-data/](http://www.toronto.ca/covid-19-weekday-status-of-cases-data/).

Between March 2020 and May 2021 there have been approximately 20,000 unique individuals who have used the shelter system. During that same period there have been a total of 1640 confirmed cases of COVID-19 that have been linked to shelter outbreaks. This information includes both staff and client cases. Tragically, there have been a cumulative total of 9 COVID-19 related deaths among individuals using the shelter system in Toronto.

### ***Enhanced Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) measures***

Infection prevention and control, commonly referred to as IPAC, is a term used to describe actions or practices that can help prevent or control the spread of bacteria and viruses, and other microorganisms. Examples of IPAC practices include cleaning hands often, following procedures to keep working environments clean, and using personal protective equipment (PPE).

The City is committed to decreasing outbreaks in the shelter system and continues to provide enhanced supports to ensure expedited immunization and enhanced IPAC measures – already established in these settings – are being followed and improved upon where necessary. Each shelter has identified an IPAC lead to coordinate IPAC work and to focus on continuous improvements. The City has engaged an external IPAC consultant and representatives are visiting sites across the shelter system, providing additional guidance, and will be facilitating in-person training and education including for on-site environmental services and cleaning staff. Toronto Fire Services and Toronto Paramedics staff have also been deployed to provide additional on-site monitoring and observation to enhance the IPAC supports available on an interim basis, while enhanced internal capacity across the shelter system is increased. Since the beginning of May, 21 sites have been visited by these teams. Toronto Public Health has recently developed new IPAC training modules that will be available to all shelter staff.

The City is participating in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program by piloting a rapid COVID-19 antigen testing program at five locations. The test is a less invasive than other tests, and provides a screening result within fifteen minutes. The rapid test will be used at priority sites for new admissions including sites that offer spaces to people living

outside and in encampments. Anyone who screens positive will have a confirmatory laboratory test and be offered supports and safe isolation space.

Below are examples of the measures taken since the start of the pandemic to ensure the safety of the shelter system:

- ensuring physical distancing of at least two metres laterally between beds in order to meet the [City's shelter standards directive](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/9582-TSS-Directive-2020-01-Physical-Distancing-Standards.pdf), (available at [www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/9582-TSS-Directive-2020-01-Physical-Distancing-Standards.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/9582-TSS-Directive-2020-01-Physical-Distancing-Standards.pdf)) which is based on Ministry of Health guidance for congregate living settings during the pandemic
- encouraging physical distancing in all areas of the shelter, including washrooms, dining and common areas
- ensuring the mandatory use of masks for staff throughout shifts and issuing a [directive for mandatory masks or face coverings](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/98a6-TSS-directive_mask-requirements_Sept-15-2020.pdf) for clients in all common areas available at [www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/98a6-TSS-directive\\_mask-requirements\\_Sept-15-2020.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/98a6-TSS-directive_mask-requirements_Sept-15-2020.pdf)
- proactive symptom screening at all points of entry into the shelter system and active daily screening and monitoring of all clients and staff for COVID-19 symptoms
- transporting more than 1900 people with symptoms to provincial assessment sites for testing and working with Ontario Health Toronto Region and hospital partners to deliver on-site testing as recommended by Toronto Public Health
- operating an isolation and recovery program with wrap-around health and harm reduction supports for more than 3,600 people who await test results or test positive to recover
- increasing infection control and prevention (IPAC) activities including enhanced cleaning protocols at all shelter sites
- continuing distribution of an average of approximately 100,000 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) weekly, including medical masks for use by staff
- providing funding to non-profit shelter providers for direct purchase of PPE and to support implementation of enhanced IPAC measures
- providing guidance and funding for improvements to ventilation and indoor air quality
- limiting movement of clients and staff between shelters, wherever possible
- conducting ongoing quality assurance site visits to all locations to confirm compliance with IPAC measures and provide direction for remediation where required
- communicating regularly with homelessness sector partners to share current status of response and latest guidance through regular webinars and a dedicated webpage on the City's website
- launching an information campaign, through posters and flyers, to inform people experiencing homelessness about the measures to ensure safety of the shelter system

### ***Vaccine efforts and progress in the shelter system***

People experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of COVID-19 infection and severe outcomes. Vigilant proactive infection prevention and control measures

combined with programs to reduce barriers to vaccination is fundamental to the risk-reduction strategy in these settings and improving uptake is essential.

In March, the City of Toronto successfully advocated to the Province to include people experiencing homelessness as a Phase 1 population in the vaccine rollout and our health sector partners, including Ontario Health Teams, Inner City Health Associates, Unity Health Toronto, and several Indigenous partners and organizations, initiated the immunization campaign for individuals experiencing homelessness.

As of May 31, approximately 7,500 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been provided to people experiencing homelessness and people who are precariously housed, as well as people working in the homelessness sector through clinics offered at shelters, drop in sites, encampments, and mobile clinics in the community supported by Ontario Health Teams, hospitals, and the City of Toronto. This is inclusive of some first and second doses and both staff and clients. These figures, provided by Ontario Health, do not include individuals who may have received their vaccine by other means such as with their primary care provider, at a pharmacy, or at an off-site location.

At the end of April, City of Toronto implemented mobile vaccination teams and started providing immunization clinics for this vulnerable population to augment available immunization opportunities, working in collaboration with all health sector partners. The City of Toronto mobile teams are comprised of members from various divisions including Toronto Public Health, Toronto Paramedic Services, Toronto Fire Services as well as the Sunnybrook Centre for Prehospital Medicine.

All shelter locations have now had at least one vaccine clinic offered on-site. One third (32%) of shelter programs have reported that at least 65% of current clients over the age of 12 have received a first dose. With the change in age eligibility and as new people enter the shelter system each day, increasing vaccine coverage rates within the shelter system is an ongoing priority and will require multiple repeat opportunities for on-site clinics to ensure everyone staying in shelter is offered the vaccine.

SSHA is actively working with our partners in the Toronto Shelter Network to support vaccine uptake in the shelter system by:

- Identifying a vaccine lead at each shelter site to coordinate efforts, act as a champion and provide education and information to clients and staff
- Providing supports to homelessness service providers for vaccine outreach
- Increasing financial incentives for vaccine uptake
- Supporting a peer vaccine ambassador program for people with lived experience of homelessness

In total, mobile teams have delivered 140 clinics with 2,997 doses administered since the end of April.

## **2. Coordinated interdivisional response to encampments**

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a noticeable increase in the number and size of encampments across the City. This is due to a number of reasons such as:

- people moving from ravines and more remote locations into more visible areas

- reduced options due to the pandemic for people to stay with friends, family or other temporary accommodations
- fears related to COVID-19 in the shelter system
- an increase in the number of people discharged from provincial correctional facilities, who may not have housing to return to. According to Statistics Canada, between February and April of 2020, the number of adults in provincial custody declined by 29% in Ontario, which is more than 2,300 people.
- pressures from across the region of people seeking to access services in Toronto
- reduced access as a result of capacity reductions to other provincial programs and services (i.e. detox, withdrawal and mental health facilities)

This increase in the number and size of encampments has led to heightened concerns about the safety and well-being of people living outdoors, as well as the impact on the surrounding community. The City remains focused on providing a human services response to encampments and voluntary referrals for people sleeping outdoors into safer, indoor spaces through shelter programs, hotel spaces and housing options with supports. The City's response to encampments also responds to the concerns of a range of community stakeholders, and supports the need to ensure park space is available for a broad range of uses.

The City has an interdivisional response to encampments that is being coordinated by the Office of Emergency Management. Our objective is to ensure that people experiencing homelessness feel comfortable accepting offers of safe inside space with supports and referrals to permanent housing, through efforts to immunize people experiencing homelessness, enhance IPAC measures in the shelter system and work with those living in encampments.

### **3. Supports for people living outdoors**

Understanding who is staying outdoors in encampments, and what their needs are, is critical to developing and improving services and programs to enable them to move indoors. Based on data available in the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) about everyone referred from an encampment to shelter, we know that:

- 68% identify as men, 29% as women, and 3% as Transgender and Non-binary
- the majority are between the ages of 25 and 54 (82%), with 4% between 18 and 24, and 15% older adults over the age of 55
- 40% of individuals referred inside from an encampment had no previous shelter use in Toronto prior to the start of the pandemic, indicating they may be new to homelessness, or to the city.

In addition to ongoing consultations and engagement with people living in encampments and stakeholders, an Encampment Engagement Survey was conducted in March 2021. This three-phase survey engaged 72 current and former encampment residents across a wide range of geographic locations throughout the city. Survey participants received a \$10 cash honorarium in recognition of participants' time and expertise. The purpose was to give a voice to those individuals in identifying their needs and provide an opportunity to those individuals in identifying what supports and services they need to end their homelessness.

Key findings include:

- In general, people staying in encampments are not new to Toronto - 44% of survey respondents indicated they have always been here, while 43% indicate they have been here longer than 4 years.
- Survey respondents primarily identified as white (48%), while 17% of respondents identified as Black and 27% of survey respondents identified as Indigenous
- About 30% of those staying in encampments last had housing within the past year. 63% of respondents last had housing between 2 to 12 years ago
- The majority of survey respondents who lost their housing post-March 2020 do not attribute this loss to the COVID-19 pandemic (82%); rather they attribute it to other factors like lack of affordability.

The top three reasons for staying in an encampment are:

- Sense of community, including a sense of belonging and the ability to live with partners, friends & family (44%)
- Privacy and control over daily schedule and space (44%)
- And loss of housing including – could no longer stay with family & friends (e.g. were previously couch surfing) (29%)

See Attachment 2 for more details.

Meaningful engagement with people experiencing homelessness is a key principle of a human rights approach to housing, and the City will continue to engage with those staying in encampments to understand their needs, and to improve shelter and housing services.

### ***Streets to Homes outreach and progress in moving people indoors***

The City's Streets to Homes team and community outreach partners provide outreach services across the City 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, to engage with individuals sleeping outside offering them supports and referrals. Outreach workers are familiar with encampments and the individuals in them, offering services, building relationships, helping with accessing ID, health care including mental health and harm reduction supports, and developing a housing plan.

Parks Ambassadors also visit parks with encampments to conduct wellness checks and share information about washroom access, showering facilities, vaccine clinic information and more. Parks Ambassadors play an important role at encampments by referring people experiencing homelessness to Streets to Homes staff to help connect them with City services and partner supports. To date in 2021, Parks Ambassadors made 619 referrals to Street to Homes for people experiencing homelessness in parks.

Neither Streets to Homes staff nor Parks Ambassadors are involved in enforcement activities or posting of notices.

Since July 2020, the City's Streets to Homes and partner agency staff have engaged more than 19,000 times with people living outside in encampments – listening to and understanding their needs on a daily basis with care and compassion, and offering them

services that meet their needs and referrals to safer inside space with supports including meals, laundry, harm reduction and access to a housing worker.

The City has helped more than 1,600 people staying in encampments move to safe inside space since the start of the pandemic including 203 people in the past month.

In 2020, Streets to Homes and partner agencies secured permanent housing for at least 305 people who were sleeping outside. In 2021, so far almost 100 people have been housed. In the past 10 years, the City has helped 6,000 individuals who were sleeping outside to secure permanent housing and 80 percent remain housed after one year.

As of May 31, 2021 there are approximately 368 tents or other temporary structures located in 59 geographically diverse City of Toronto parks. There are 53 tents of other temporary structures in 41 locations on right of way (ROW) passages.

It can be difficult to accurately track the number of people sleeping in encampments, as people may come and go, and have alternate arrangements that they use on an occasional basis. Not all tents or temporary structures may be occupied on an ongoing basis. As has been reported previously, based on the above information, staff estimate that there may be currently approximately 300-400 people staying in encampments.

### ***Pathways Inside Project***

The Pathways Inside Project, initiated in March 2021, is a coordinated and enhanced approach to addressing encampments that is modeled on work in other North American jurisdictions that have had success in resolving encampments. This approach mitigates the health and safety risks associated with large encampment sites by providing enhanced services and supports to assist individuals in accessing alternative indoor spaces.

The Pathways Inside Project focuses outreach and service efforts on four large priority downtown encampment sites – Moss Park, Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra Park and Lamport Stadium, as well as other priority encampment locations based on need.

Since the pandemic began, more than 400 people from these four priority encampments have accepted referrals to safe, inside space at a variety of shelter and hotel locations.

Additional indoor space has been opened that specifically addresses encampment resident feedback regarding indoor space. In particular, individuals residing in encampments have noted that access to single-occupancy hotel rooms, on-site harm reduction supports, and a service location that is close to existing encampment community supports are important considerations for them when moving to indoor spaces. The additional harm reduction supports described below are focussed in particular on those locations receiving referrals from encampments.

SSHA has worked closely with TPH and other community harm reduction programs to introduce a range of harm reduction measures in all shelter locations, which includes ensuring locations have access to on-site harm reduction supplies, mandatory staff training on overdose prevention, and creating an overdose response program for shelter

residents that use drugs. iPHARE, which stands for Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction initiative, is a multi-pronged effort by the City and community agencies to address opioid-related deaths in Toronto's shelter system, and includes investments of over \$7 million for harm reduction and mental health case management supports at shelter and hotel locations with the highest needs, including those receiving referrals from encampments. In addition to establishing Supervised Consumption Sites at several locations, this approach includes development of peer witnessing programs and regular wellness checks, particularly for people who are alone in hotel rooms to reduce the risk of overdose.

A range of other services have been offered to support people living in encampments and encourage them to accept referrals to inside space. All Park washrooms are open to the public. In addition to the portable toilets used to augment the supply of brick and mortar park washrooms, PFR installed 22 portable toilets and sinks to support high-needs park locations with encampments. In addition, the City has opened a number of facilities with showers, washrooms and drinking water for anyone in need of these services. The locations and hours of these facilities can be found on the [City's webpage](http://www.toronto.ca/affected-city-services/?accordion=washroom-and-sanitation-services) at [www.toronto.ca/affected-city-services/?accordion=washroom-and-sanitation-services](http://www.toronto.ca/affected-city-services/?accordion=washroom-and-sanitation-services).

The City's Streets to Homes outreach team provides water to individuals in encampments as well as health and harm reduction supplies. Outreach teams do not directly distribute food but will assist clients to access nearby meal programs or food banks.

A process to store belongings for those who have moved to indoor spaces has been developed, and a list of what can be stored and how to retrieve belongings is provided to individuals at the encampment sites. The City will store eligible items including usable tents for up to 6 months, which can be retrieved by calling a centralized phone number. Items will be returned within 48 hours when requested. Ensuring individuals moving to inside space can take belongings with them or providing storage are safer options than leaving them unattended outside. Tents and/or structures that remain in the park when someone accepts a referral inside are removed to reduce the impact on parks and public spaces.

One of the other key challenges identified through engagement with those living in encampments as well as community stakeholders is the loss of informal and formal indoor space typically accessed by individuals experiencing homelessness and at-risk of homelessness as a result of the pandemic. Many daytime drop-in service providers have limited access to indoor space in order to achieve physical distancing and have shifted their operations from sit-down meals and in-person appointments to takeaway food and alternative remote/virtual supports. Other more casual spaces, such as libraries, community centres, coffee shops, and restaurants are also closed or have significantly limited indoor access.

Recognizing the impacts of COVID-19 on daytime drop-in services and the vital importance of safe and accessible indoor space for people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness, SSHA, in collaboration with the Toronto Drop-in Network, has provided up to \$1 million to fund proposals from existing daytime drop-in providers for small capital projects and/or operational enhancements that recover or

operationalize new indoor space and indoor services for individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness in Toronto.

#### **4. Safety of encampments and access to park space**

While the City has taken all of the above measures to provide supports and services to people living outdoors, encampments are unhealthy, unsafe and contravene City by-laws, and are not a solution to unsheltered homelessness. Where appropriate, the City will enforce its bylaws at encampments only after exhausting all options available to help people move indoors.

In October, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice dismissed a request for an injunction that would have required the City of Toronto to suspend the enforcement of its Parks Bylaw that prohibits camping and the erection of tents and other structures in City parks during the current pandemic. While this ruling was made, the City's focus remains on engaging and building trust with those living outside to assist them to move into safe indoor spaces.

The health outcomes for people who stay outside are complex and serious. Individuals living in encampments are also vulnerable to the risk of contracting COVID-19.

Open flames, generators and unsafe wiring, combined with the storage of gasoline, propane and other highly flammable substances are both very common and extremely dangerous and increases health and safety risks for individuals living in encampments.

There have been 95 fires in encampments so far this year, including three fires in the last week (at Lamport Stadium, on Unwin Avenue and under the Gardiner Expressway). On May 27, Toronto Fire Services cleared 24 propane cylinders and other flammable and combustible materials, including gas cans, at a single encampment near the Don Valley Parkway. In 2020, Toronto Fire Services responded to 253 fires in encampments – a 250 per cent increase over the same period in 2019. Tragically seven people have lost their lives as a result of encampment fires in Toronto since 2010.

The City's response to encampments also supports the need to ensure park space is available for a broad range of uses, taking into consideration community and stakeholder needs, access to green space for safe outdoor recreation during the pandemic, and upcoming summer parks programming and permitting requirements including for summer camps.

PFR has a mandate to maintain City parks that are safe and accessible to all residents of Toronto. Parks staff are responsible for parkland maintenance (e.g., sodding, seeding, irrigation and mowing of grassed areas), litter picking, and amenities such as washrooms, playgrounds, sport fields and sport courts. Over the past year, PFR has significantly increased service levels for litter picking, needle clean-up and debris clearing at or near encampments located in City parks.

PFR Parks Ambassadors provide outreach and referrals and dedicated Parks clean-up crews who pick litter and clean debris at and/or near encampment sites. Increased and

dedicated resources have been assigned to complete these efforts due to the increased service requirements.

Encampment sites can present challenges for park maintenance and contribute to significant additional operational costs. Seasonal and routine park maintenance cannot go ahead at encampment sites due to the hazards created by tents, equipment and out of concern for the safety of people living in encampments. The park area that is covered by an encampment (e.g., tents and equipment) experiences damage which can become significant depending on how long the encampment is present. These parks areas will need substantial restoration once encampments are no longer present.

City parks are intended for recreational and community purposes including outdoor programming through community recreation programs and the anticipated resumption of permits for picnics, events and sports as the Province advances through its reopening framework. Parkland is not evenly distributed throughout the City, and this is particularly the case downtown where parkland is under significant pressure due to high population growth and development. Encampments are typically located in the downtown and displaces recreational activities and permitted areas. Given this situation, the City is advancing several strategies to prevent new encampments.

Parks staff will work with stakeholders to conduct safety audits of the parks. These park audits will focus on lighting, pruning, furniture placement within the park and other improvements that can be made to improve park safety.

Park staff will maintain a visible presence in parks with a known history of encampments to perform outreach, litter pick up and to work with other City agencies on proactive responses to prevent new encampments. Parks operations staff and Parks Ambassadors will address debris and litter and actively engage and conduct outreach with park users. MLS and Corporate Security staff will also proactively monitor these parks in evening and overnight hours. These staff will play a critical role in monitoring and responding to any new encampments as they are being established.

In preparation for changes in provincial regulations, PFR will be increasing the number of community recreation activities throughout parks this summer which will also be available for outdoor programming and permitting that will further animate parks in the downtown and across the City. Further, PFR will work with community groups including BIAs to activate parks and include all members of the community to benefit from and enjoy parks.

## **5. Importance of federal and provincial support for permanent solutions to homelessness**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has moved rapidly to add new affordable rental and supportive housing options for people experiencing homelessness. Between April 2020 to April 2021, 5,518 people experiencing homelessness moved from the shelter system into permanent housing.

To meet the increasingly complex needs of individuals that are currently experiencing homelessness and help transition them into permanent housing, City Council has

requested that provincial and federal governments urgently allocate funding to provide a range of supports to address the system gaps in health and other service systems that are contributing to the challenges communities are facing.

### ***COVID-19 Recovery Response Plan and Emergency Housing Initiative***

In October 2020, City Council requested the federal and provincial governments to accelerate investments in the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan to urgently create 3,000 permanent housing opportunities by the end of 2022 as an urgent response to the pandemic. The 3,000 affordable homes are proposed to be comprised of:

- 1,000 permanent modular homes;
- 1,000 new homes through acquisitions and renovations/conversions; and
- 1,000 additional new portable Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits (COHB) to help households secure housing available for rent in Toronto and across the region.

Of the 3,000 permanent homes, 2,000 are intended to have supports attached to help people successfully exit homelessness and achieve long term housing stability.

In December 2020, City Council approved a staff report which outlined an Emergency Housing plan for the City to deliver a minimum of 1,248 supportive homes by the end of 2021 as an urgent response to the growing number of encampments across the city. See Attachment 3 for a map of locations.

### ***Key Programs and Investments to deliver New Housing Opportunities***

Below is a summary of the key programs, actions and investments that the City, federal and provincial government are directing to alleviate some of the pressures on the City's homeless system:

- **Modular Supportive Housing Initiative** – modular housing is high quality, pre-fabricated housing which is built in a factor and assembled onsite. Modular housing provides a rapid and dignified response to homelessness and is a key city program to help people exit homelessness
- **Rapid Re-housing Program** – through this partnership with Toronto Community Housing, people experiencing homelessness are moved into vacant apartments with appropriate supports to help them live successfully
- **Open Door Program** – the City's Open Door program provides financial incentives to support the delivery of new affordable and supportive housing
- **Federal Rapid Housing Initiative** - On October 27, 2020, the federal government allocated \$203 million in capital funding to the City of Toronto to create new housing as part of the COVID-19 Housing & Homelessness Response Plan. This funding will allow the City to create about 540 new permanent, supportive housing opportunities over the next 6 to 9 months.
- **City Capital (pivot from shelter to housing)** – In December 2020, the City directed \$47 million in capital funding in 2021 be re-directed from SSHA's shelter budget to the Housing Secretariat to build new, permanent supportive housing
- **Housing Benefits**
  - Housing Allowances - This non-repayable subsidy helps eligible households pay rent and is paid directly to the individual, so it can be used to secure housing in the private market, and it is portable, within Toronto.

- Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit – is a portable housing benefit, monthly subsidy provided to low-income households to assist with housing costs, tied to the household and can be used to pay rent anywhere in Ontario.

Since the start of the pandemic, 816 people have been assisted to move into new homes through new supportive housing opportunities created.

The table below provides a summary of the new affordable rental and supportive housing opportunities proposed to be created over the next 9 to 12 months

*Table 1 – Additional Planned Housing Opportunities*

Program/Initiative	No. of New Housing Opportunities to be delivered
Modular Housing	406
Acquisitions	392
Toronto Community Housing	450
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,248</b>

On April 7, the Province announced \$15.4 million in operating funding for 2021 dedicated to supportive housing in Toronto. A commitment for ongoing funding beyond 2021 will be required to support residents in these new supportive homes and to ensure their health and well-being long term.

### ***Support for Renter Households to Prevent Homelessness***

Addressing the underlying reasons people become homeless and may end up in encampments is also critical to long term solutions. Data from the City's Shelter System Flow Dashboard, available at ([www.toronto.ca/shelter-system-flow-data/](http://www.toronto.ca/shelter-system-flow-data/)), shows that more than 400 new people become homeless each month and enter the shelter system. According to data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, there are approximately 35,000 households currently in rental arrears in Toronto. While the City has enhanced available eviction prevention programs, there is also the urgent need for immediate assistance from other orders of government to address the urgent scale of housing instability exacerbated by the ongoing economic uncertainty of the pandemic. City Council has previously requested the provincial government provide urgent renter assistance by establishing a provincially funded and delivered temporary rental assistance program that supports tenants to avoid evictions due to arrears and pay the rent during the pandemic.

### ***Strategic Partnerships – The Social Medicine Initiative***

Addressing the housing and homelessness crises impacting our city will require support from all levels of government, as well as the private and non-profit sectors including health and social service partners.

As the needs of people experiencing homelessness become more complex, supportive housing models will need to focus on a systems integration approach to appropriately address the full range of needs of each individual. One key example of an innovative approach that aims to do just this is the Social Medicine Initiative, a partnership between the City of Toronto, the University Health Network (UHN) and the United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT).

The Social Medicine Initiative seeks to advance the integration of various systems to improve outcomes for vulnerable and marginalized populations across the broad range of issues, including: access to good quality, safe and secure affordable housing; access to a full range of supportive services; reducing social isolation and loneliness; improving access to transportation equity and mobility; increase food access and security; and improved employment conditions and income supports.

Since the onset of the pandemic, UHN has worked with the City to support the testing and vaccination of people within the shelter system, as well as the setting up of shelter hotel recovery sites those that had tested positive for the virus.

The partnership is currently focused on using land owned by UHN in Parkdale to create new permanent supportive housing. Resources from all three partners will be coordinated to develop a range of housing, health and social services onsite. Recognizing the inextricable link between poverty, health and social outcomes, and the need to take a systemic approach to improving the lives of residents across the city, priority groups for the new housing opportunities will include people who are currently under-served by the healthcare system while experiencing homelessness and other challenges imposed by poverty.

The City will continue its commitment to this valuable partnership, to ensure the Social Medicine Initiative is not only a successful model for Toronto, but also an opportunity to explore new partnerships and achieve similar approaches to coordinating housing, health and social objectives across the GTHA and Ontario.

## **CONCLUSION**

Similar to many large, urban centres across Canada and globally, Toronto's homelessness crisis has been driven by a number of factors including a shortage of purpose-built rental supply; increased demand due to population growth; social assistance rates; precarious employment and job losses due to the pandemic; systemic gaps in the mental health and justice systems; and the growing opioid crisis.

While the City is taking significant steps to urgently address homelessness, regional, provincial and national leadership is need to deal with the underlying causes of poverty that negatively impact the housing, health and socio-economic outcomes of low-income households, particularly those from vulnerable and racialized communities who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. Despite significant investments that have been committed by the federal and provincial governments since the onset of COVID-19, there continues to be service gaps requiring additional investments to adequately address homelessness.

As sectors work towards an equitable recovery from the pandemic, increased coordination between and within governments and across sectors will be necessary to expand the supply of affordable and supportive housing and meet the changing and complex needs of people experience homelessness. As previously outlined in Item PH19.11, new flexible funding from the provincial and federal governments for health partners and community agencies that support them will be vital to help people successfully transition from shelters with appropriate supports. These supports include mental health services and a range of substance use treatment and overdose prevention supports delivered as part of an integrated and enhanced service model.

Providing good quality, safe, affordable housing and a range of support services for people experiencing homelessness will not only improve their health and wellbeing, it will help build more resilient systems while also reducing costs and burden to the public sector. At this critical time, these investment will also help boost recovery for our city, region and country.

Ongoing focus and advocacy from the City of Toronto to other orders of government is required to ensure that the ultimate goal of creating accelerated housing for Toronto residents experiencing homelessness is achieved.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Chris Murray  
City Manager

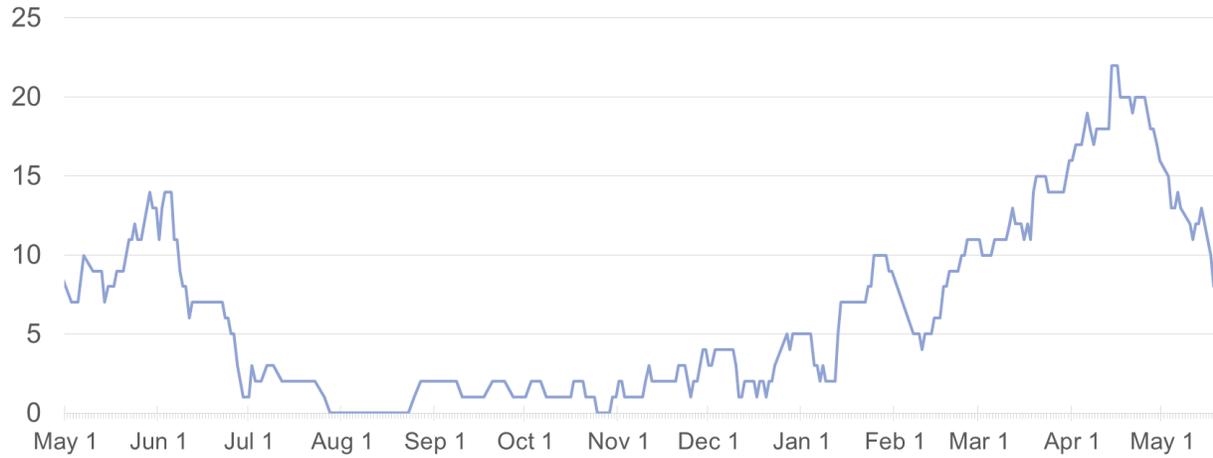
## **ATTACHMENTS**

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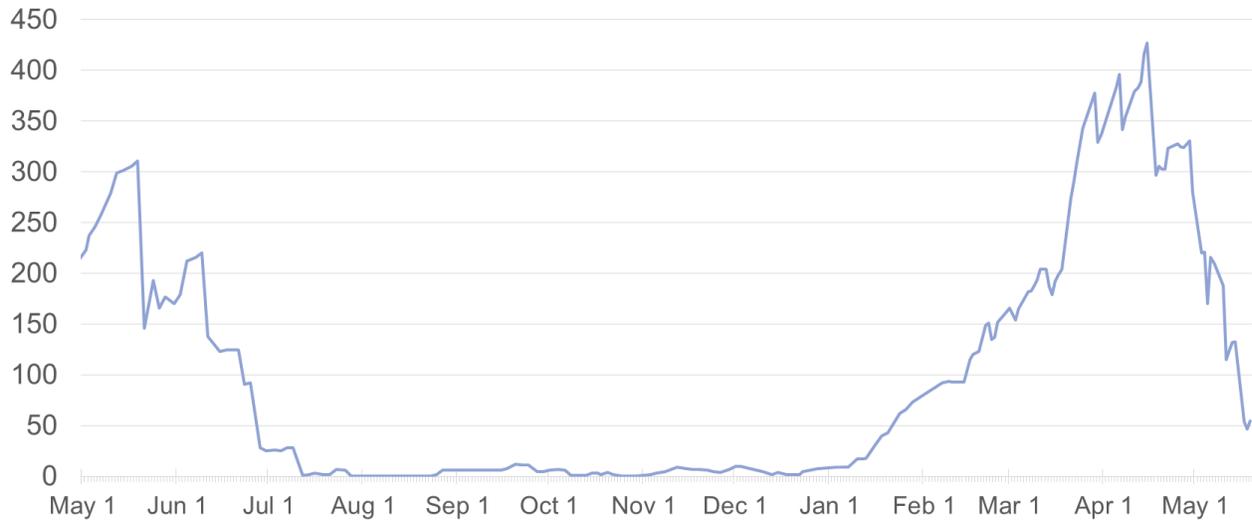
Attachment 1: Shelter outbreaks and cases over time  
Attachment 2: Profile and service needs of those staying in encampments  
Attachment 3: Location of new supportive housing buildings

## Attachment 1: Shelter outbreaks and cases over time

### Active Shelter COVID-19 Outbreaks over time



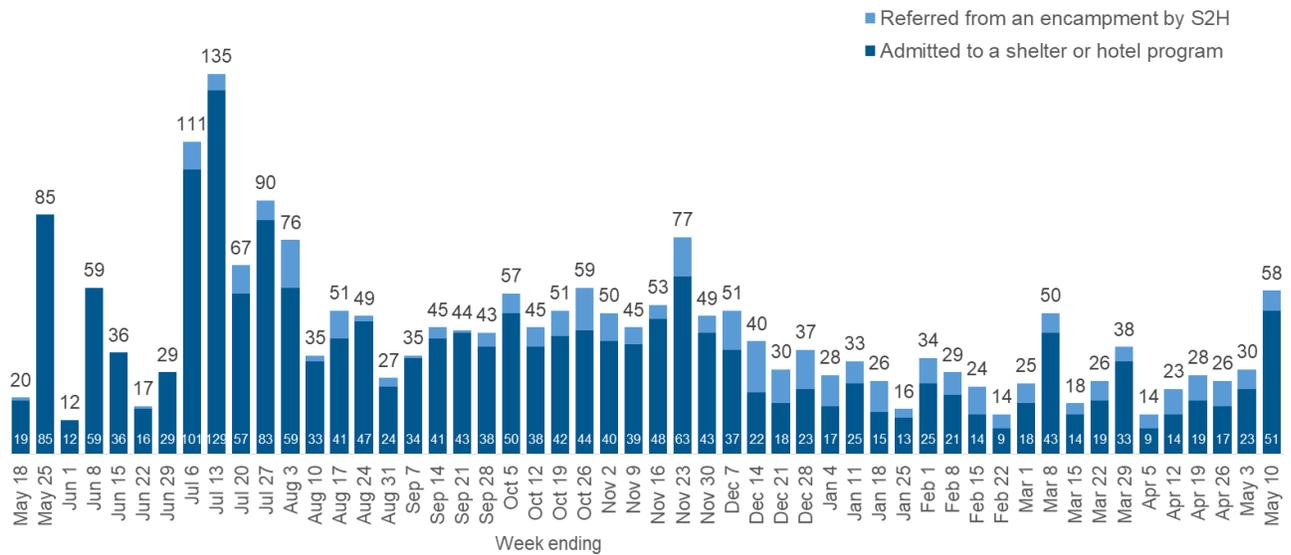
### Shelter outbreak related COVID-19 cases over time



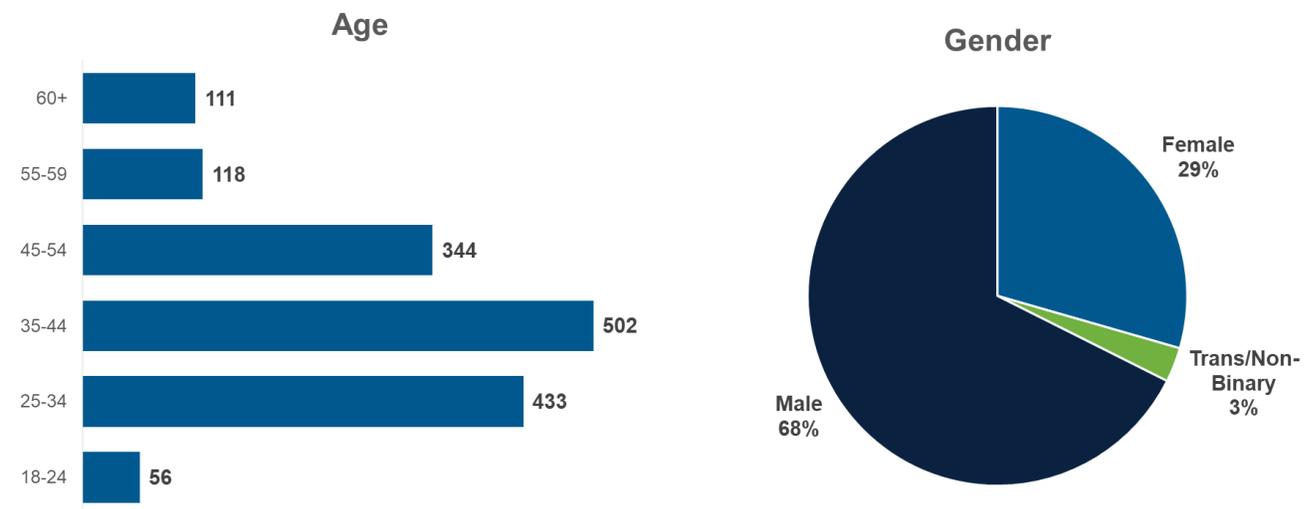
Retrieved from TPH public reporting  
Data current as of May 29, 2021

## Attachment 2: Profile and service needs of those staying in encampments

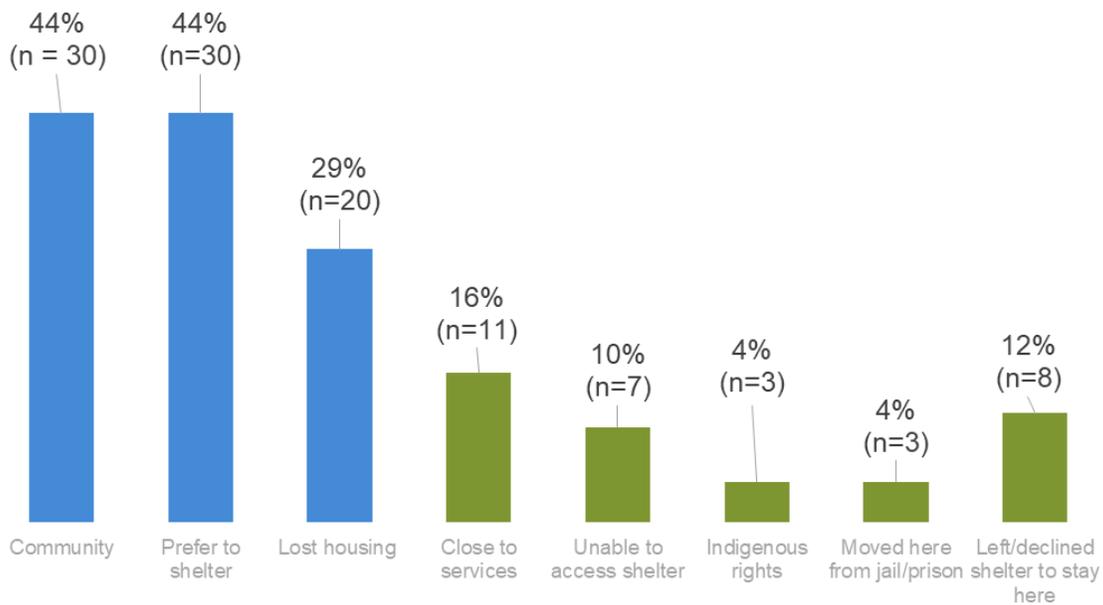
### Streets to Homes Referrals into shelter from Encampments



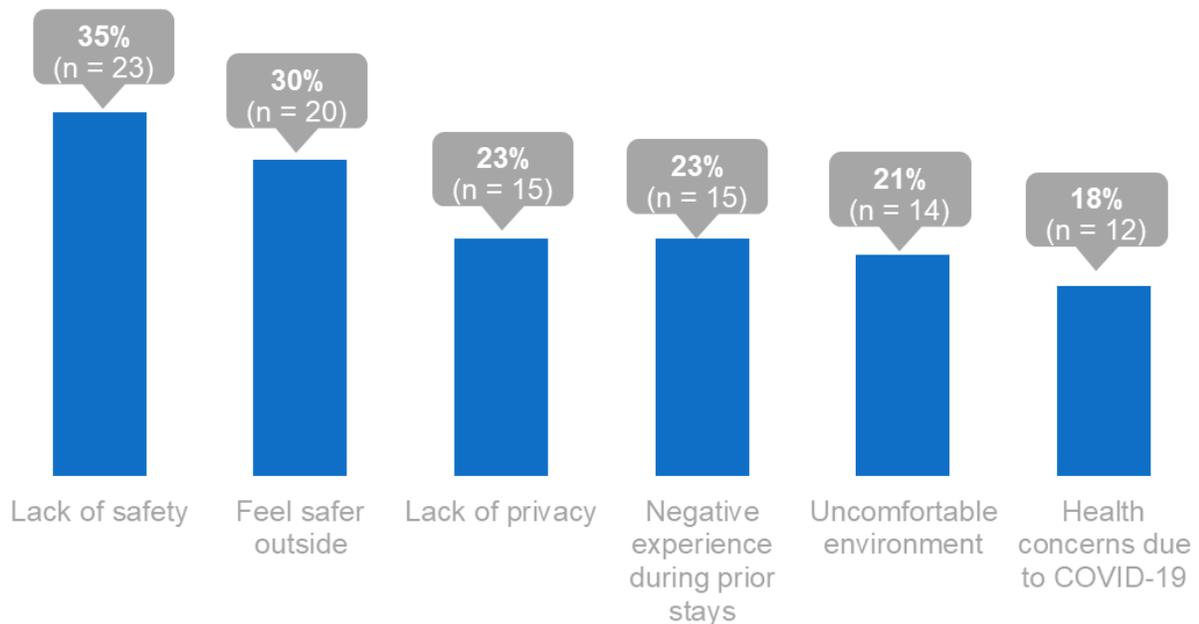
### Demographic profile of clients referred from encampments (SMIS data)



**Reasons identified by survey respondents for staying in an encampment**  
 (Encampment Engagement Survey, conducted in March 2021)



**Reasons identified by survey respondents for not accessing in shelter (survey results)**



**Top four services that survey respondents indicated they want or need to live close by to, regardless of housing type preferred (e.g. shelter, hotel or housing).**

